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ABSTRACT

Recent studies on educational effectiveness in the United States have criticized deficiencies of the educational system, rather than acknowledging its achievements. The eight characteristics of excellent schools described in "Search for Excellence" by Peters and Waterman (1982) provide a comparative framework for an assessment of organizational characteristics of nine public schools that have received the Award of Excellence from the U.S. Department of Education. The findings indicate that excellent schools are characterized by action; student, parent, teacher, and community involvement; productivity through people; utilization of incentives based on value consensus; functions concentrated within the scope of education; reduced administrative personnel; and simultaneous implementation of structural and interpersonal processes. The major conclusion is that excellence does exist in the U.S. educational system. (LMI)

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EXCELLENCE IN EXCELLENT SCHOOLS

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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ABSTRACT

EXCELLENCE IN EXCELLENT SCHOOLS

Excellence in business and industry has been studied extensively during the past 10 years; resulting in publications describing the characteristics of excellence. During the same period, education has also come under a great deal of scrutiny. However, the emphasis has not been on the excellence found in individual schools, but the lack of achievement supposedly demonstrated by the educational system as a whole. Criticism of the deficiencies in education, rather than acknowledgment of the achievement attained by many schools, has been the norm.

The following information was gathered through a study of nine schools that have received the Award of Excellence by the United States Department of Education. The eight characteristics found by Peters and Waterman [1982] in their Search For Excellence studies have been used as a basis for comparison with similar practices found in excellent schools.

A BIAS FOR ACTION

Improvement is not limited by tradition and bureaucracy. Emphasis on quality and achievement for all students is the constant goal and is attained through expanded curricular offerings, outstanding teaching, increased use of technology and effective use of time.

CLOSE TO THE CUSTOMER

Schools are for students; parents are active partners in their child's education. Parents and patrons are knowledgeable about the philosophy and goals of the school and provide informed support.

AUTONOMY AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

A common vision enables the recognition of the individuality of students and teachers. Failure is accepted; learning from mistakes allows people to grow and improve. Teachers are empowered and treated as professionals who are expected to provide the instructional leadership necessary for an outstanding educational experience.

PRODUCTIVITY THROUGH PEOPLE

The only thing that is flexible in an organization is people. Dreams are encouraged and teachers are provided with opportunities, not obligations.

HANDS ON, VALUE DRIVEN

A common vision is understood and practiced. Values are demonstrated in predominantly qualitative, rather than quantitative terms. Monitoring is done to determine growth, not control actions.

STICK TO THE KNITTING

This characteristic involves a concept appropriate to business but not related to education. The point is to stay with what you know and don't expand your business into areas that you do not have appropriate expertise.

SIMPLE FORM, LEAN STAFF

This characteristic is also one that has little application to education. In business it refers to the reduction of top level administrative personnel.

SIMULTANEOUS LOOSE-TIGHT PROPERTIES

Peer relationships contribute more to expectancy levels than does control through accountability. Common vision and values hold the process together.

As was found in the Search for Excellence studies, the characteristics are not equally present in all schools and do overlap. However, vision is present in every school and is the driving force behind all of the other characteristics.

Reference

Peters, Thomas J. and Waterman., Robert H. Jr., (1982) In Search Of Excellence, New York: Warner Books.

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EXCELLENCE IN EXCELLENT SCHOOLS

Excellence in business and industry has been studied extensively during the past 10 years; resulting in publications describing the characteristics of excellence. Emphasis has focused on the need for the characteristics of excellence to be implemented in all companies if business and industry in the United States are to stay competitive with the rest of the world.

During the same period, education has also come under a great deal of scrutiny. However, the emphasis has not been on the excellence found in individual schools, but the lack of achievement supposedly demonstrated by the educational system as a whole. Criticism of the deficiencies in education, rather than acknowledgment of the achievement attained by many schools, has been the norm.

All organizations, while their goals are different, are basically comprised of an organizational structure and the people within the system. This being the case, can it be assumed that those characteristics that make organizations excellent will be the same in all settings?

The following information was gathered through a study of nine schools that have received the Award of Excellence by the United States Department of Education. The eight characteristics found by Peters and Waterman [1982] in their Search for Excellence studies have been used as a basis for comparison with similar practices found in excellent schools.

As was found in the Search for Excellence studies, the characteristics are not equally present in all schools and do overlap. However, vision is present in every school and is the driving force behind all of the other characteristics.

A BIAS FOR ACTION

Improvement is not limited by tradition and bureaucracy. Emphasis on quality and achievement for all students is the constant goal and is attained through expanded curricular offerings, outstanding teaching, increased use of technology and effective use of time.

Things do happen in excellent schools! One of the dominant characteristics is the breadth of the curriculum. Constant striving to improve instruction and consideration for the needs of individual students provides an excitement that is contagious. Programs are provided for all students and not just the academically oriented.

Art, music, and activity programs are outstanding and enthusiastically described when the curriculum is discussed. The awards earned by these programs are as numerous as any program in the school and are proudly displayed. Programs, exhibits, and performances are provided to enable students to demonstrate their skills. Some schools purchase student art and hang it in central locations to demonstrate student accomplishments.

All the schools recognize the importance of having instructional resources available. Expanded and in-depth instruction is supported by instructional media centers that provide an environment conducive to learning. Print and non-print materials are in excess of those provided in the usual school. While the facilities and resources are exceptional, the lack of certificated media specialists in the elementary schools is noticeable. Accreditation at the secondary level provides the pressure for the additional expenditure for personnel, but elementary schools are not as fortunate. However, some elementary schools did have certificated personnel but were forced to eliminate these positions when state funding for education was cut back.

Technology is evident with each school having many more computers and computer labs than are usually provided. Computer labs are used in the areas of writing, accounting, computer skills, drafting and technology, and journalism. Emphasis on technology is also demonstrated through the curriculum change from traditional vocational shop courses to high tech, such as robotics and computer assisted design. The secondary schools are also producing their own yearbook layouts and newspapers with Macintosh computers.

Advanced placement courses are offered in abundance and variety in all of the high schools. Passing rates for the advanced placement students are in the 80-90% range and in some smaller enrollment courses 100% is achieved. One high school offers advanced placement courses and courses directly from the university in the community to make it possible for

students to be in their junior year of college by the time they graduate from high school.

Individual teacher course development is encouraged. The departments and programs that are easily recognized as being outstanding have faculty members that are excited about their teaching and constantly work to improve their offerings to students.

Programs for the special education student to the gifted student are offered. Teachers are not afraid to fail but are encouraged to try new instructional approaches that will more effectivly meet the needs of their students. Improved instruction is accomplished through peer pressure created by outstanding program development and teaching, rather than by administrative authority and accountability.

Examples of outstanding programs include the following:

* The responsibility for a high school bookstore was given to the special education students. Services and sales increased, the area was decorated in a very attractive manner and cinnamon rolls were baked by the students and added to the items for sale. The students learned how to interact with other students and manage the business operations of the bookstore. Everyone in the school was very pleased and the special education students learned new skills and gained experiences that would not have been possible in the usual school setting.

* A gifted program required that a parent serve as a volunteer if his or her child is to be admitted. This involvement proved to be very effective and other teachers, seeing the positive results, also requested that parents become more actively involved in their child's education. Parents are more knowledgeable about the school's goals and programs and have become much more supportive.

* A computer lab in an elementary school is operated by volunteer parents. In-service was provided for a part-time paid aide [mother] and she trained 30 volunteers that operate the lab. Students and parents use the lab during the school day and also before and after school.

* Quality circles, grade level teams, departments and other forms of small groups are active. When a need is identified, those impacted are able to quickly come together and develop a solution. The teachers feel that they have the professional responsibility to develop effective instructional strategies and will be supported by the administration with

the needed encouragement and resources.

* Each secondary school is using a different time schedule. The determination of the schedule is based upon the needs of the students in the individual building and include:

a. 6 period traditional schedule with optional 7th. period.
b. 7 period traditional schedule.
c. 7 period rotating schedule.
d. 6th. grade 3 block cluster and three period movement, 7th. grade 2 block cluster and 4 period movement and 8th. grade traditional 7 period schedule.
e. 8 period block alternate day
f. trimester

Two of the elementary schools use a traditional schedule and the third is on a year-round schedule.

The variety of schedules is indicative of each school's autonomy and flexibility. They are not limited by constraints placed on them by the state or district. Rather, the faculty and administration determine the most effective way to use the time allowed to provide the most effective curriculum and instructional processes. The administration and faculty implement what is needed to improve the educational program and do not limit themselves by tradition or bureaucracy.

CLOSE TO THE CUSTOMER

Schools are for students; parents are active partners in their child's education. Parents and patrons are knowledgeable about the philosophy and goals of the school and provide informed support.

Instructional emphasis is on the success of the student. The parents and community know the goals of the school and actively participate as volunteers, committee members, and presentors. Most of the schools have active Parent-Teacher or Parent-Teacher-Student Organizations that accept responsibility for fund raisers and support activities.

The elementary schools are exceptionally good at using volunteers. The year-round school had 20,000 hours of volunteer time during the past school year. Another middle school reported over 8,000 volunteer hours

through the involvement of over 400 different people.

One elementary school raises $8,000 to $12,000 annually through PTO sponsored fund raisers. An instructional need is identified each year and all of the activities focus on that particular subject or program. All funds are then spent to improve that specific program.

Statements, such as, "**Families are partners in a child's education**" and "**When you take a child by the hand, you take a parent by the heart,**" are indicative of the attitude of the administration and faculty toward involvement of the parents in their children's education.

Some schools use additional advisory committees, while others feel that their PTO is adequate and an additional committee is not necessary. Through direct involvement in the school parents know that the faculty and administration care for their children and are working to provide the best education possible. Statements such as the following are indicative of the positive attitude of the parents toward the school: "**The principal knows the names of all your children,**" and "**Parents actually seem to be part of their child's learning experiences. Teachers emphasize over and over again that they are an extension of our own high standards and values.**"

Students are very positive toward the schools and feel that the curriculum provides adequate opportunities for everyone. They feel that the faculty cares and wants them to succeed. Statements such as the following are representative of the comments of the students: "**Teachers care for you. They don't just tell you, they show you,**" and "**Teachers will meet with students before and after school for help sessions. Some teachers hold sessions at their homes in the evenings, especially the AP teachers.**"

School-business partnerships are very successful. For example, a travel agency allows the students of a middle school to occupy unused seats for flights to San Francisco and Los Angeles. The travel agency notifies the administration of the number of empty seats for the next day and students and chaperones, either teachers or parents, are identified. Sometimes the trip only includes the opportunity to fly, but depending upon the flight, some trips enable the students to spend some time in the city and visit attractions prior to their return home.

Other examples include restaurants and fast food establishments that

provide free meals for outstanding students. In some instances winners are drawn from names of students that have been "**caught doing something good.**" This allows all students and not just the academically gifted to be recognized.

Civic organizations have outstanding students attend their meetings and be recognized by the membership. The point of the activities is to acknowledge that achievement is important and should be recognized.

Parents and the community are kept informed through newsletters, slide presentations, newspapers and advisory committees, etc.. In some instances the PTO or advisory committee is responsible for the development of a parent handbook and weekly newsletter. The administration and faculty feel strongly that they have outstanding students and programs and that it is important to have the parents informed and involved in the school.

Teachers acknowledge the importance of the parents in organizing and supervising selected activities. They emphasize that the activities would not be possible if the teachers had to organize them in addition to their regular instructional duties.

All of the schools emphasize the importance of having a pleasant and enjoyable environment. Outside landscaping is a priority and an attempt is made to make the outside appearance of the building representative of the excellence inside. It is felt that if students are to have pride in themselves and their work, they should also have pride in their school. It should be a place that students enjoy coming to and are proud to bring their parents and friends.The halls are painted in light and bright colors with good lighting. Flowers are hung throughout the buildings and the cafeterias have table clothes and flowers on each table. Paintings, plaques, displays, aquariums, and live birds are provided to make the building representative of the positive attitude that is demonstrated in the instructional and activity programs.

Following the suicide of a middle school student it was felt that more needed to be done to reach the students and help them feel comfortable in getting help with their problems. The counseling area was remodeled with a large open area off of the hall that has tables and chairs for waiting, a canopy for identification and lights and fans for atmosphere. The counseling offices are behind this area to provide privacy, but everyone

now knows where the counseling center is and students are not shy about being seen there.

Schools are for students; and the customer, whether it be the students, parents, or patrons, is considered a participating partner in the educational process.

AUTONOMY AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

A common vision enables the recognition of the individuality of students and teachers. Failure is accepted; learning from mistakes allows people to grow and improve. Teachers are empowered and treated as professionals who are expected to provide the instructional leadership necessary for an outstanding educational experience.

Teacher empowerment is evident in all schools. Teachers feel they are encouraged to evaluate their programs and work toward improvement. They also feel that their administrators support them and provide the resources necessary to implement their ideas to improve instruction. Failure is acceptable as a learning tool and is not held against teachers in their evaluations. The variety of programs attest to the individual development of the faculty.

The vision of the school is determined through cooperation of the faculty and once the parameters are set, the individual teacher has the ability to function independently within the parameters. It is interesting to hear teachers describe how much they appreciate their principal encouraging them to stretch because they know they will be supported with whatever is needed for them to succeed.

One middle school is run completely by the faculty. Quality circles are formed for making all decisions. The budget, schedule, and teacher assignments are made by the faculty. The schedule was placed in the faculty room and two teachers were looking at it to determine their requests for teaching assignments and time periods for the next year. One teacher's preference had already been selected and she responded, "Why does Mr. Smith have his name down for that class? Is he qualified to teach that subject? I guess that he must be and even though he hasn't taught it

before it will be a good experience for him to expand into a new area." The right to be involved and participate in the decision making process process had enabled the teacher to change her attitude from one of concern for her own need to one of positiveness toward a fellow teacher and his contribution to the school.

Teachers design their programs and then develop curriculum guides for each course. Some of the guides have been adopted by the State Department of Education for state wide implementation.

Champions, those exceptional teachers with the drive to continually improve, are evident in all schools. They are not restricted by the bureaucracy, but allowed to dream and feel confident that their administrators will support their dreams. The courses offered by these teachers are exciting and students are anxious to participate. A high school jewelry design class needed 4 additonal sections and a physiology class increased from 20+ to 8o+ students for the next year.

Teachers like each other and interact on a consistant basis. Formal communication and interaction processes are established within the school and between the school and community. However, the informal interaction within the formal structure provides a constant basis for growth.

Every principal reported that since receiving the recognition of excellence the school had continued to improve. When a new principal had been assigned he/she expressed the opinion that the old principal wouldn't recognize the school because of its continued improvement and the many changes that had been implemented. However, they acknowledged that this growth was not due to them but to their faculty.

The administration and faculty of excellent schools tend to act, instead of react. They know what their goals are and are not afraid to implement new programs and instructional strategies that they feel will improve education.

PRODUCTIVITY THROUGH PEOPLE

The only thing that is flexible in an organization is people. Dreams are encouraged and teachers are provided with opportunities, not obligations.

Trust, respect, and recognition are consistently demonstrated by principals of excellent schools. They are not afraid of losing control by empowering teachers. They are not after the glory or recognition of the achievement attained in their schools. Rather, they speak of the excellence of their teachers.

It is recognized that the most important element in any successful organization is the people. Respect for the individual is evident through activities recognizing students, faculty, and support staff. Pictures, awards, and plaques acknowledge outstanding achievement through teaching and program development.

Excellent businesses and schools provide the members of the organization with opportunities, not obligations. They assume that what is good for the people is good for the organization and concentrate on growth, rather than accountability.

Utah schools experienced a unique situation when the retirement system provided an early retirement window and many teachers and administrators took advantage ot it. Some of the schools studied had lost from 20 to 25 teachers in a two year period. This large turnover had very little effect on the school due to the strong philosophical base and emphasis on the individual teacher and cooperative planning. The new teachers were selected because their educational and instructional philosophies were in tune with those of the school They were then allowed to develop their programs according to their individual strengths and interests. Collaborative systems and consistant monitoring provide a means for new faculty to come into the system and know exactly what the school is about.

The one area that is lacking is in staff development.The individual schools provide in-service activities that are pertinent to the identified needs of the faculty, but broader staff develpment services by the district are limited. Teachers are encouraged to keep current and informed, but most staff development activities are "job embedded." That is, they occur during the teachers' regular school day. The principals are very resourceful and find the funds to provide as many opportunities as possible. Teachers are developing through individual achievement and study, but are not provided with the means for greater growth through a planned and

organized staff development program.

Principals acknowledge the need for recognizing their faculty members and providing for their continual growth, but their resources at the building level are limited and decisions at the district level tend to be made according to the budget and not according to people.

The principals of all the schools are highly visible. They are out of their offices and about the school. They know their teachers and are very knowledgeable about the instructional programs. They are very proud of the accomplishments of their teachers and serve as "cheerleaders" when talking about them.

It is also evident that the teachers have a positive attitude toward their principal. In most cases, when teachers were asked what made their school excellent, they stated, "the principal." They recognize that he or she provides the means for them to be excellent as teachers and the process makes the school excellent. Often they would reflect a minute and then also respond, "the teachers, we make the school excellent." They realize that they provide the program development and implementation of instruction that ensures student growth. And yet, they also recognize the role of the principal in providing the conditions that allow them to continually grow and strive for excellence in their teaching.

Faculty rooms are much better than what is typically provided. A number have recently been remodeled and in some instances the faculty designed the room and actually did the remodeling. The attitude appears to be that teachers work hard and need a pleasant and comfortable area in which they can relax and interact with one another. The furniture is usually fairly new and the room is well decorated. Art is hung and the room is light and airy.

In excellent schools the climate is very open and faculty members are encouraged to associate with one another. The climate is usually such that the discussions center around what the teachers are doing instructionally and not so much on the negative concerns about how they are being treated. A collegial feeling of caring for one another is evident.

Students are very positive about their schools. They feel strongly that they are included in the development of the programs and their opinions are respected. They express the view that the students care for each other and help each other in their classes. Curriculum is designed to meet the needs

of all the students and not just the academically talented. Peer support structures are implemented in a number of programs. For example, one writing lab uses a program based on peer evaluation. The students know exactly what skills or concepts are being taught in every assignment and can easily assist each other. This cooperative learning enables the students to write and learn from the experience. The teacher critiques the developed paper and makes sure the students have attained the desired skills. Cooperative learning through peer interaction is a very important element of the writing lab.

Research has found that the principal is the single most important person in influencing what happens in a school. This is clearly the case in the excellent schools. The principal has a clear vision of what the school is about. This vision is understood and practiced by other administrators, teachers, and support staff. Everyone can explain his/her role and describe examples of excellent programs that enable students to achieve their goals. The principals are leaders and provide the climate and resources for all members of the staff to be the very best that they can be in their respective positions. Productivity through people is accomplished through the vision and support of the principal.

HANDS ON, VALUE DRIVEN

A common vision is understood and practiced. Values are demonstrated in predominantly qualitative, rather than quantitative terms. Monitoring is done to determine growth, not to control actions.

In excellent schools the vision of what they are about and where they are striving to go is evident. Mottos and logos are displayed and yearly themes are identified by many. These yearly themes indicate the goals for the year and everyone, in and out of the school, knows what is being emphasized. Emphasis on excellence and achievement for all students is evident.

A common belief system is clearly defined, understood, and practiced by everyone in the building. Not only teachers, but custodians, secretaries, cooks, and aides, understand their role in the educational process and decisions are made according to these beliefs and not strictly according to

finances. When finances are lacking, the administrators obtain the necessary funding through grants, fund raisers, and community support, rather than foregoing the new program.

As in excellent companies, excellent schools demonstrate their values in predominantly qualitative, rather than quantitative terms. Their beliefs are formalized, but only as a means of identification. The development of these beliefs comes primarily from informal functional practices. The formalization provides a guide or parameter within which to function and a means to determine achievement, but does not restrict the individuality and drive of the faculty member.

Belief statements, such as, **"Quest For The Best," "There Are No Bad Students,"** and **"Being Good and Getting Better,"** are predominantly displayed in the halls and on various publications. Of course, displaying a belief is important, but working toward its fulfillment is the sign of excellence. The administration and faculty are committed to the attainment of their goals.

Monitoring is a common practice. Teachers know where they want to be and want to know if they are getting there. Testing is not done for testing sake but to provide a data base from which growth can take place. The faculty study the testing data and make their decisions accordingly.

Goals are also based on testing data. For example, it was determined that achievement in math in one elementary school was down. Improvement in math was then identified as a goal for the next year and by concentrating on math instruction the scores improved by 20 points.

The "Totally Responsible Person" program of one elementary school emphasizes excellence, positive self-respect, and respect for others. All the schools strive for achievement for all students, but they also emphasize growth as individuals and respect for others. Cognitive gain on achievement tests is only one goal. Developing as a person is also considered to be primary and programs and activities are designed to assist students in gaining the necessary attitudes and skills.

One middle school has a scholarship fund for college student financial assistance. Although college entrance is a number of years away, the administration and faculty are starting to impress upon the students the importance of continuing their education. Students participate in contributing funds and raising revenue at an early age and know that they

will be eligible for support when it is their turn. The value of education is important and students are encouraged to develop this belief while they are young and experiencing a positive educational experience.

There is no "**Us Versus Them**" attitude within the individual school; rather, a cohesiveness and spirit of "**Our**" school exists. While this attitude is found at all levels, it is evident to a greater degree in the elementary schools. Concern is evident when the discussion relates to the district. While the teachers are basically positive toward the activities of the district, there is evidence that the "**Us Versus Them**" attitude exists.

STICK TO THE KNITTING

This characteristic involves a concept appropriate to business but not related to education. The point is to stay with what you know and don't expand your business into areas that you do not have appropriate expertise.

Education at the public school level does not become involved in enterprises outside or unrelated to education. This might be debated when programs that have traditionally been provided by the home and church are carried over into the schools. However, these programs are still related to providing services to students and are readily implemented in the excellent schools.

SIMPLE FORM, LEAN STAFF

This characteristic is also one that has little application to education. In business it refers to the reduction of top level administrative personnel.

Education has traditionally been lacking in the number of administrative personnel. While this might be questioned at the district level, it is very clear at the building level. Most schools, at both the elementary and secondary levels, do not have administrators other than the principal. Assistant principals are usually evident only in the larger secondary schools. Secondary accreditation standards propose an assistant

for every 450 students, but most schools do not reach this ratio.

Every secondary school in the study had at least one assistant principal. Three of the four high schools had two assistants. However, these schools ranged from 1166 to 1627 students. The one school with only one assistant had 1097 students. The three middle schools had one assistant principal and a student population of 557 to 1061.

None of the elementary schools had an assistant principal. Their student populations ranged from 468 to 1088.

As can be seen, every school had fewer assistants than the recommended standards prescribe. When the student population and number of faculty and staff are considered, the administration staff of the typical school is as lean as it can get.

SIMULTANEOUS LOOSE-TIGHT PROPERTIES

Peer relationships contribute more to expectancy levels than does control through accountability. Common vision and values hold the process together.

Loose-tight relationships in education are usually considered to be negative in nature. Education is clearly a bureaucracy and tightly controlled by policies and regulations which are established by the school, local school board, state school board and legislature. Curriculum guides determine instructional content and procedures, supervision policies determine supervisory practices, discipline policies determine student-teacher interaction, and the bus schedule determines everything else. The negative concern is with the loose properties. Teachers in an individual school, while under the auspices of the state and school district, still function with a great deal of autonomy.

Common vision and values hold the process together. In excellent companies and schools the loose-tight relationship is viewed as a positive, rather than a negative factor. The tight structure forms the parameters within which everyone must function. When a common vision is achieved, each individual is then allowed the autonomy to use his/her professional judgment to determine the most effective way to teach. Teachers are not controlled by the structure of rules and regulations; rather they are

controlled by their professionality. Expectations are high and the means to achieve are provided. Peer relationships contribute more to expectency levels than does control through accountability.

Excellent schools have a common vision. From the administration to the custodian, every member of the organization has a common understanding of what the outcomes for students are expected to be. The schools are organized to achieve this common goal and yet allow for individual autonomy. Each person is challenged to continually review his or her responsibilities and programs and develop strategies that will do an even better job. High expectations are held and monitoring of results is evident in all the schools. However, the data gathered are used as a means to determine growth and future needs, and not control or hold the faculty accountable.

The communication and interaction among the participants provides the means for mutual awareness and individual approaches to achieve a common end. The policies and procedures are not ends in themselves.

While not all schools equally apply all of the excellence characteristics and not all of the teachers are totally involved and supportive of the administration and programs within the school, the commonalities are very evident.

Excellence Does Exist in Education.

REFERENCES

Peters, Thomas J. and Waterman, Robert H. Jr., (1982), In Search of Excellence, New York: Warner Books.